



## Jordan

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

### **International Religious Freedom Report 2009**

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The Constitution stipulates that the state religion is Islam but provides for the freedom to practice the rites of one's religion and faith in accordance with the customs that are observed in the Kingdom, unless they violate public order or morality. The Constitution also stipulates that there shall be no discrimination in the rights and duties of citizens on grounds of religion. The Government's application of Shari'a (Islamic law), however, infringes upon the religious rights and freedoms laid out in the Constitution by prohibiting conversion from Islam and discriminating against religious minorities in some matters relating to family law, including inheritance practices. Members of unrecognized religious groups also face legal discrimination.

The status of respect for religious freedom by the Government was unchanged during the reporting period. The Government continued to play a prominent role in promoting interfaith dialogue and harmony, including by hosting a visit by Pope Benedict XVI for a full program that included a meeting with King Abdullah. However, the Government continued to harass some citizens suspected of proselytizing Muslims and a few converts to Christianity, including by attempting to induce them to revert to Islam. The Shari'a court, which has family law jurisdiction for Muslims, continued proceedings against a convert from Islam. Converts from Islam risk the loss of civil rights.

Relations between Muslims and Christians generally were good, and prominent societal leaders and members of the royal family continued to take steps to promote religious freedom. Adherents of unrecognized religions and Muslims who convert to other religions face societal discrimination and the threat of mental and physical abuse.

The Ambassador and other U.S. government officials discussed religious freedom with the Government as part of active, ongoing efforts to promote human rights. In addition, the Embassy supported a number of exchange and outreach programs that facilitate religious tolerance.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 35,637 square miles and a population of 6.3 million. More than 92 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim. Official and unofficial estimates of the number of Christian citizens vary from 1.5 to 5 percent of the population. According to church leaders there are an estimated 150,000 Christians. According to representatives of the respective communities, there are a small number of Shi'a Muslims, approximately 1,000 Baha'is, and an estimated 14,000 Druze. There are no statistics available regarding the number of persons who are not adherents of any religious faith.

Officially recognized Christian denominations include the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic (Melkite), Armenian Orthodox, Maronite Catholic, Assyrian, Coptic, Anglican, Lutheran, Seventh-day Adventist, and Presbyterian churches. Christian churches not officially recognized but registered as "societies" include the Baptist Church, Free Evangelical Church, Nazarene Church, Assemblies of God, Christian and Missionary Alliance, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Unrecognized Christian denominations include United Pentecostal and Jehovah's Witnesses. There are Chaldean and Syriac Christians and Shi'a among the Iraqi refugee

population, referred to as "guests" by the Government.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) generally agree that the number of Iraqis living in Jordan is 100,000 to 200,000. As of March 30, 2009, approximately 54,000 Iraqis residing in the country were registered with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as refugees or asylum seekers. Of those registered with the UNHCR, 45 percent are Sunni Muslim, 35 percent Shi'a Muslim, and 12 percent Christian.

With few exceptions, there are no major geographic concentrations of religious minorities. The cities of Husn, in the north, and Fuheis, near Amman, are predominantly Christian. Madaba and Karak, both south of Amman, also have significant Christian populations. The northern part of the city of Azraq has a sizeable Druze community. There also are Druze populations in Amman and Zarqa. There are a number of non-indigenous Shi'a living in the Jordan Valley and in the south.

## Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

### Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution, in Article 14, provides for the freedom to practice the rites of one's religion and faith in accordance with the customs that are observed in the Kingdom, unless they violate public order or morality. Article 6 stipulates that there shall be no discrimination in the rights and duties of citizens on grounds of religion. According to the Constitution, the state religion is Islam and the King must be Muslim.

The Constitution, in articles 103-106, also provides that matters concerning the personal status of Muslims are under the exclusive jurisdiction of Shari'a courts, which apply Shari'a in their proceedings. Personal status issues include religion, marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. Personal status law follows the guidelines of the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence, which is applied in cases that are not explicitly addressed by civil status legislation. Matters of personal status of non-Muslims whose religion is recognized by the Government are under the jurisdiction of Tribunals of Religious Communities, as outlined in articles 108 and 109.

Neither the Constitution, the penal code, nor legislation ban conversion from Islam or efforts to proselytize Muslims. However, the Government prohibits conversion from Islam in that it accords primacy to Shari'a, which prohibits Muslims from converting and governs their personal status, despite the Constitution's religious freedom provisions and the country's ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The Government freely allows conversion to Islam.

The Government does not recognize converts from Islam as falling under the jurisdiction of their new religious community's laws in matters of personal status; converts are still considered Muslims. Under Shari'a, converts are regarded as apostates and may be denied their civil rights if any member of society files an apostasy complaint against the convert. In cases decided by a Shari'a court, judges have annulled the convert's marriage, transferred child custody, conveyed property rights to Muslim family members, deprived them of civil rights, and declared them wards of the state and without any religious identity.

Shari'a is applied in all matters relating to family law involving Muslims or the children of a Muslim father. All citizens, including non-Muslims, are subject to Islamic legal provisions regarding inheritance. Minor children of male citizens who convert to Islam are considered Muslims. Adult children of a male Christian who has converted to Islam become ineligible to inherit from their father if they do not also convert to Islam.

In June 2006 the Government published the ICCPR, which the country had ratified without reservations in 1976, in the Official Gazette. International covenants published in the Official Gazette possess the force of law but, according

to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, are subservient to the Constitution if discrepancies exist. Article 18 of the ICCPR states that everyone shall have the "right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion," including freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom "to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice, and teaching." Additionally, the ICCPR stipulates that no one shall be subject to coercion that would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice. However, articles 103-106 of the Constitution provide that matters concerning the personal status of Muslims, including religion, are the exclusive jurisdiction of Shari'a courts, which have always ruled to deny Muslims the freedom to adopt a different religion or belief.

The head of the department that manages Shari'a court affairs (a cabinet-level position) appoints Shari'a judges, while each recognized non-Muslim religious community selects the structure and members of its own tribunal. All judicial nominations must be approved by the Prime Minister and commissioned officially by royal decree. Members of Protestant denominations registered as "societies" must use one of the recognized Protestant church tribunals. There are no tribunals for atheists or adherents of unrecognized religions such as the Baha'i Faith. Such individuals must request one of the recognized courts to hear their personal status cases.

There is no provision for civil marriage or divorce. Members of religious groups that have no legally recognized court system sometimes convert to another Christian denomination or to Islam in order to divorce legally.

On January 21, 2009, the cabinet officially made the Council of Church Leaders, comprising the heads of the 11 officially recognized Christian denominations in the country, the Government's reference point for all Christian affairs. The Council serves as administrative body to facilitate official business, including the issuance of work permits, land permits, and marriage and birth certificates, with government ministries, departments, and institutions. Unrecognized Christian denominations, despite not having full membership on the Council, must also conduct business with the Government through the Council. As of the end of the reporting period, this new structure was reportedly functioning adequately for both members and non-members of the Council, although concerns exist over the Council's human resources capacity to effectively manage all Christian affairs.

The publication of media items that slander or insult religion is prohibited under Article 38 of the Press and Publications Law, which imposes a fine of up to \$28,000 (20,000 dinars) as stipulated in Article 46.

The Government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet's Ascension, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, the Islamic New Year, Christmas, and the Gregorian calendar New Year. Christians are traditionally given leave on Christian holidays approved by the Council of Church Leaders, such as Palm Sunday and Easter.

Employment applications for government positions occasionally contain questions about an applicant's religion. Religious affiliation is required on national identification cards and legal documentation, including on marriage and birth certificates, but not on travel documents, such as passports.

Christians serve regularly as cabinet ministers. Of the 110 seats of the Lower House of Parliament, nine are reserved for Christians. In November 2007 the King appointed four Christians to serve in the Upper House. No seats are reserved for adherents of other religious groups. The number of Druze is too small to warrant a seat, but they are permitted to hold office under their government classification as Muslims.

The Government traditionally reserves some positions in the upper levels of the military for Christians (4 percent); however, all senior command positions are held by Muslims. Division-level commanders and above are required to lead Islamic prayer on certain occasions. According to the Foreign Ministry, Christians are dispersed throughout the armed forces. There are only Sunni Muslim chaplains in the armed forces; however, Christian and Shi'a Muslim

members of the military are not prohibited from practicing their religion.

While Christianity is a recognized religion and Christians, both local and foreign, may profess and practice the Christian faith, churches must be accorded legal recognition through administrative procedures in order to own land and administer sacraments, including marriage. Churches and other religious institutions can seek official recognition by applying to the Prime Minister's office.

The Prime Minister confers with the Council of Church Leaders on the registration and recommendation of new churches. The Government also refers to the following criteria when considering recognition of Christian churches: the faith must not contradict the nature of the Constitution, public ethics, customs, or traditions; the Middle East Council of Churches must recognize it; the faith must not oppose the national religion; and the group must include some citizens of the country.

There were no reports of banned religious groups.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Trusts (Awqaf) manages Islamic institutions and the construction of mosques. It also appoints imams, provides mosque staff salaries, manages Islamic clergy training centers, and subsidizes certain activities sponsored by mosques. The Government monitors sermons at mosques and requires that preachers refrain from political commentary that could instigate social or political unrest.

Recognized non-Muslim religious institutions do not receive subsidies; they are financially and administratively independent of the Government and are tax-exempt. However, the Government revoked the tax-exempt status of the Jordanian Evangelical Theological Seminary (JETS), which it does not allow to accept Muslim students, in 2006. The Free Evangelical Church, the Church of the Nazarene, the Assemblies of God, and the Christian and Missionary Alliance are registered with the Ministry of Justice as "societies" but not as churches. Churches registered with the Ministry of Justice, however, are not subject to restrictions contained in the 2008 Law on Associations (Law Number 51). The Baptist Church is registered as a "denomination" with the Ministry of Interior.

Although the Government does not recognize the Druze religion and the Baha'i Faith, it does not prohibit their practice. The Druze did not complain of official or societal discrimination. On national identity cards, or "family books," which normally identify the bearer's religious community, the Government records Druze as Muslims. The Government does not officially recognize the Druze temple in Azraq; four social halls belonging to the Druze are registered as "societies."

Baha'is face similar official discrimination. On national identity cards, the Government either records Baha'is as Muslims, leaves the space blank, or marks it with dashes. The Baha'i community does not have its own court to adjudicate personal status matters. Such cases may be heard in Shari'a courts. The Department of Civil Status and Passports (DCSP) does not recognize marriages conducted by Baha'i assemblies, but it does issue passports on the basis of these marriages. Additionally, if one Baha'i parent is registered inaccurately as a Muslim, or if a parent or grandparent converted from Islam to the Baha'i Faith, they are unable to obtain birth certificates for their children as they are considered illegitimate. This problem is compounded by the DCSP not officially recognizing Baha'i marriages. The Government does not permit Baha'is to register schools or places of worship. There are two recognized Baha'i cemeteries, but the cemetery in Adasieh is registered in the name of the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, despite requests to register it under the Baha'i Faith.

Atheists must associate themselves with a recognized religion for purposes of official identification.

The Government recognizes Judaism as a religion; however, there are reportedly no Jewish citizens. The Government does not impose restrictions on Jews, and they are permitted to own property and conduct business in

the country.

Public schools provide mandatory religious instruction for all Muslim students. Christian students are allowed to leave the classroom during these sessions. Christian students in private and public schools must learn verses from the Qur'an and Islamic poetry in both Arabic and social studies classes in preparation for mid-year and end-of-year exams. The Constitution provides that congregations have the right to establish schools for the education of their own communities "provided that they comply with the general provisions of the law and are subject to government control in matters relating to their curriculums and orientation." Several Christian denominations operate private schools in several cities that are open to adherents of all religions, such as the Baptist, Orthodox, and Latin schools.

The Ministry of Tourism has oversight over the preservation of holy sites and encourages tourism to the four main historic Christian and many Islamic religious sites in the Kingdom, including the Shi'a pilgrimage site near Karak. There were no reports of misuse or neglect of these sites, nor of harassment, discrimination, or restrictions in their use.

#### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

There were no reports that the practice of any faith was prohibited, but some government actions impeded the activities of some Muslim and non-Muslim groups. Some religious groups, while allowed to meet and practice their faith, faced official discrimination. In addition, not all Christian denominations have been accorded legal recognition.

Iraqi Christian churches reported no restrictions on the practice of their faith. During the reporting period, a group of Iraqi Sunni scholars stated that they were no longer pursuing government permission to establish a religious institute and training center. They reportedly received no response to their May 2007 request for approval.

JETS, a Christian training school for pastors and other Christian leaders licensed by the Government in 1995, operates as an educational institution under the Ministry of Culture, but was denied accreditation in 2004. Because JETS is not accredited, its students are not eligible for student visas but may enter the country on tourist visas of limited duration. JETS programs are multiyear and consequently many students overstay their visas. Upon departure from the country they and any family members who may have accompanied them are required to pay \$2 (1.5 dinars) for each day they spent without a visa (as are other visiting foreign nationals). However, the Government did issue visas and residency permits to JETS visiting professors during the reporting period.

The Department of Civil Status and Passports practice of not officially recognizing marriages conducted by Baha'i Assemblies continued to hinder the issuance of birth certificates to some Baha'i children. Children must have birth certificates to register for school. In one case, the Department changed the religion on the identification card of a female Baha'i, who is married to a Baha'i man, to Islam. Since government policy, following Shari'a, forbids a Muslim woman to marry a non-Muslim man, her husband would have to convert to Islam in order for them to obtain a legally recognized marriage certificate. Because the couple did not have one, the Department continued to refuse the issuance of a birth certificate to their child unless the father's name was omitted from the certificate, making the child illegitimate.

On October 19, 2008, authorities arrested poet and *Al Arab Al Yawm* reporter Islam Samhan and charged him with slandering Islam for incorporating verses of the Qur'an and prophets in his book of poetry. Two weeks prior to Samhan's arrest, the Grand Mufti, the country's senior religious leader, issued a fatwa calling him an "infidel" and an "apostate," and described the use of Qur'anic verses as an act of blasphemy. Samhan was charged with violating two articles of the Press and Publications Law, including Article 38, which prohibits the publication of media items that slander or insult religion. On October 24, 2008, authorities released Samhan on \$1,400 (1,000 dinars) bail. On June 21, 2009, the court sentenced Samhan to one year's imprisonment and fined him \$14,000 (10,000 dinars) on

charges of slandering Islam and insulting "religious sentiment." At the end of the reporting period, Samhan was still on bail pending an appeal of the Court of First Instance's ruling.

Churchgoers reported the presence of security officers in civilian clothes outside churches of some Christian denominations on several occasions during the reporting period. Security officials reportedly did not state a reason for their presence. A few religious leaders also reported being summoned by the General Intelligence Directorate (GID) for questioning on their church's activities and church membership.

#### Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the reporting period, a few converts from Islam to Christianity reported being summoned and questioned by GID officers after family members complained to authorities about the conversion. GID personnel reportedly questioned their beliefs, threatened court and other actions, and offered rewards for denouncing the conversion, such as employment opportunities. These converts also reported that GID personnel withheld certificates of good behavior required for job applications, or to open a business, and told employers to fire them. Other converts reported receiving no harassment by authorities and, in at least one instance, officials positively intervened to mediate a dispute between a convert and family members.

On June 22, 2009, newspapers cited conflicting reports about a hunger strike staged by Islamic fundamentalist prisoners at the Swaqa Correctional Facility to protest mistreatment and solitary confinement. Police stated that the prisoners only threatened to strike but later changed their minds. On February 9, 2009, families of Islamic fundamentalist prisoners in the Swaqa and Jweideh prisons reported to Al Jazeera TV the occurrence of daily beatings and torture. Several local human rights organizations found no evidence that such beatings or other harsh treatment occurred. Rather, they found that the torture allegations were made in an attempt to stop their scheduled transfer to another ward in implementation of a prison reform program that reassigns inmates to living quarters on the basis of prisoner classification, primarily according to the type of crime they committed. The police agreed with this assessment. International and local non-governmental organizations, however, have reported that Islamic fundamentalist prisoners sometimes face harsher prison conditions than other inmates.

On March 22, 2009, an apostasy case brought to the Amman Shari'a Court by the brother of a citizen who converted from Islam to the Baha'i Faith resumed after being postponed in May 2008. The case was postponed on three separate occasions in April 2009 because both the convert and the witnesses failed to appear. The judge ordered the brother to return to the court with an address for the convert and the nearest police station in order to proceed further. The case was initiated in March 2007. The 56-year-old defendant converted when he was 19, so there appears to be no statute of limitations.

On April 22, 2008, the Sweilih Shari'a Court found Muhammad Abbad Abbad, a convert from Islam to Christianity, guilty of apostasy, annulled his marriage, and declared him to be without any religious identity. In March 2008, Abbad was reportedly taken to Sweilih Shari'a Court without legal representation on charges of apostasy. Accused of "contempt of court" and sentenced to one week's imprisonment, Abbad and his family departed the country for fear of losing their civil rights and custody of the children. The Government issued arrest warrants after their departure. At the end of the reporting period, the family remained outside the country.

In early 2008 and late 2007, approximately 30 expatriate members of evangelical churches, many of whom were long-time residents of the country, were either deported, refused renewal of residency permits, or denied re-entry after exiting the country. The Government cited concern for the evangelicals' personal safety, violation of immigration regulations, and actions while in the country that violated unspecified laws as the reasons for these decisions. Some of the evangelicals were questioned and detained without charge by GID officials before their deportation. The Government permitted four of the evangelicals to return to the country.

Following a Western media report criticizing the Government for religious freedom violations that included the expulsion of missionaries, the Council of Church Leaders issued a response in February 2008. The Council's declaration supported the Government's decision to deport or deny residency permits to approximately 30 foreign evangelical Christians. It also accused 40 unofficial missionary "sects," which were widely understood to implicitly include local evangelical churches, of fomenting sectarian strife with Muslims and threatening public security. Local daily newspapers reported on the declaration and published numerous articles and editorials critical of evangelical activities, including accusations of conducting illegal missionary work. Local evangelical church leaders attempted to publish a response to the letter but were allegedly denied permission by the dailies' editors-in-chief, although one response was found on the *Ammon* news website (<http://ammonnews.net>). Parliament issued a statement endorsing the declaration, and it briefly appeared on the website of the Jordanian Embassy in Washington, DC.

In April 2007 authorities deported Pastor Mazhar Izzat Bishay of the Aqaba Free Evangelical Church, an Egyptian national and 28-year resident married to a Jordanian, to Egypt. It was reported that they had previously interrogated him and offered no reason for the deportation.

In late 2006 authorities deported Wajeesh Besharah, Ibrahim Atta, Raja Welson, and Imad Waheeb, four Coptic Egyptians living in Aqaba, to Egypt. It was reported that the authorities questioned them about their affiliation with the Free Evangelical Church in Aqaba prior to their deportation.

#### Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

#### Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

From May 8-11, 2009, Pope Benedict XVI visited the country, during which time he met with King Abdullah, Muslim and Christian leaders, presidents of Jordanian universities, and the diplomatic corps, with a goal of strengthening the historically close ties between the country's Muslim and Christian communities and facilitating an expansion of interfaith dialogue and understanding. The Pope also conducted mass, blessed the foundation stone of a new university, and visited religious sites, including the Al Hussein bin Talal Mosque, Mount Nebo, and the site where Jesus is believed to have been baptized.

In May 2009, following the Pope's visit, the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies, under the patronage of Prince El Hassan Bin Talal and in partnership with the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, hosted a colloquium entitled "Religion and Civil Society." The colloquium explored the relationship between religion and civil society in Christianity and Islam.

On March 20, 2009, an Evangelical Baptism Center was dedicated and opened at Bethany-Beyond-Jordan. The ceremony was attended by Jordan's Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Baptist World Alliance President David Coffey, and local religious leaders. The Baptism Center is one of several new churches being constructed along the Jordan River by Christian denominations to commemorate the site where Jesus is believed to have been baptized.

In November 2008 the Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought and the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue sponsored the first Catholic-Muslim Forum. The forum, held in the Vatican, brought together approximately 50 scholars from both religions to discuss shared values and common beliefs. The scholars concluded the forum by signing a declaration calling for religious freedom, stating "Genuine love of neighbor implies respect of the person and her or his choices in matters of conscience and religion." This formulation appeared to build on the

historic October 2007 open letter, entitled "A Common Word Between Us and You," that was finalized at a conference hosted by the Institute under the patronage of King Abdullah. The open letter, signed by 138 Muslim leaders, clerics, and scholars, addressed Christians worldwide, calling for interfaith dialogue to be based henceforth on love of God and neighbor. The November 2008 declaration also called for protection of minorities, respect for religious symbols, and equal rights. This forum followed an October 2008 interfaith conference co-organized with the Bishop of Canterbury and July 2008 conference organized with Yale University.

In August 2008 the Middle East Church Council organized a regional workshop in Amman on human rights and religious coexistence entitled "Making Use of East-West Dialogue to Build a Culture of Peace." During the four-day workshop, Jordanian delegates, and delegates from elsewhere in the Middle East, the United States, and Canada, discussed the role of youth groups in promoting human rights and coexistence.

### Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Some religious groups, such as the Baha'is, while allowed to meet and practice their faith, faced societal discrimination. Some Muslims who converted to other religions reported facing social ostracism, threats, and physical and verbal abuse from their families and Muslim religious leaders. In recent years, some family members of converts have filed apostasy charges against them in Shari'a courts, which have led to convictions depriving them of civil rights, including annulment of their marriage contracts and loss of custody of their children. Citizens reported that interfaith romantic relationships have led to ostracism and, in some cases, feuds between members of the couple's families.

Anti-Semitism was present in the media, and editorial cartoons, articles, and opinion pieces sometimes depicted negative images of Jews without government response.

In June and July 2008, the Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Center hosted students from Harvard University taking part in an interfaith program to meet with political and religious leaders. As part of the program, 22 American students from the Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, and Buddhist faiths attended a camp with 35 Christian and Muslim Jordanian students. The program marked the first time that such a diverse group of students from both countries assembled to share their experiences and religions and promoted religious freedom through the practice of basic rules of respecting one another and their religious beliefs. The Jordanian students learned about religious diversity in the United States and the American students about society and traditions in the Middle East.

### Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government promotes religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Ambassador and other embassy officials raised religious freedom issues with government authorities on many occasions via formal inquiry and discussion with both working-level contacts and high-ranking officials. Embassy officers met frequently with members of the various religious and missionary communities, as well as with private religious organizations and interfaith institutions.

The U.S. Department of State continued its multiphase exchange program to send national religious scholars, teachers, and leaders to the United States to promote tolerance and a better understanding of religious freedom as a fundamental human right and source of stability.

In August 2008 eight female teachers, professors, and academics participated in an International Visitor Leadership Program on "The Role of Religion in the U.S." This program was designed to introduce participants to the intersection of government and religion and the level of freedom and tolerance enjoyed by all religious groups in the United States. Participants also learned about religion, faith, and spirituality in American society and politics and



the role of non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, and religious institutions in promoting religious freedom and civil rights. Upon return, participants incorporated experiences into classroom teaching materials.

From June 20 to August 3, 2008, the U.S. Government sponsored an assistant professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Jordan to participate in the 2009 Summer Institute on Religious Pluralism, hosted by the University of California Santa Barbara. The program, which included a study tour, focused on religion and social policy in the United States, church-state relations, dynamics of religious pluralism, and the history, sociology, and demographics of American religion.

During the reporting period the U.S. Embassy hosted two digital video conferences (DVCs) that promoted religious freedom and tolerance. On December 15, 2008, the Embassy organized a DVC at the University of Jordan's American Corner with Mohammad Abu Nimer, author of "Non-violence and Peace Building in Islam: Theory and Practice." Attendees discussed the difference between applying Islam in the United States versus in the Arab world and political and socio-cultural obstacles and opportunities to applying Islamic non-violence and peace-building methods. Students used three case studies during the DVC to learn how religious values can be effectively applied to the benefit of the greater community.

On April 1, 2009, the Embassy, in collaboration with the quasi-governmental Jordanian National Commission for Women, hosted a DVC with Dr. Mervat Hatem, Professor of Political Science at Howard University, entitled, "Feminism: Secular, Islamic and State." Forty women from a wide range of NGOs, societies, universities, and other organizations attended the DVC, which provided an opportunity to discuss the human and legal rights for women in Islam and ways to further promote women's rights in the context of the state and religion.